

Central of Georgia Railroad, Bay Street Viaduct

(Bay Street Viaduct)

(GDOT Bridge #051/00025/A/00138N)

Spanning the Central of Georgia Railroad  
tracks on U. S. 17

Savannah

Chatham County

Georgia

HAER No. GA-70

HAER  
GA,

26-SAV,  
89-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
Southeast Region  
National Park Service  
U. S. Department of the Interior  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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(Bay Street Viaduct)(GDOT Bridge #051/00025/A/00138N)

HAER No. GA-70

Location: Spanning the Central of Georgia railroad tracks on  
U. S. 17/S.R. 25 Alternate (Bay Street)  
Savannah, Chatham County, Georgia

Date of Construction: 1927 (Bay Street Viaduct Construction Plans)

Builder/Designer: Designer: Olaf Otto  
Builder: Central of Georgia Railroad

Present Owner: State of Georgia

Present Use: Vehicular bridge

Significance: The Bay Street Viaduct is representative of an intact  
example of an early 20th century viaduct built to span  
railroad tracks and yards. It is a relatively rare  
example for an important type of 20th century structure  
in Georgia. The Bay Street Viaduct is one of five  
viaducts, similar in age and length, spanning railroad  
facilities in the State. It is also the longest of  
these five viaducts in Georgia.

Historian: Susan Shepherd Prosser  
October 1987

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Bay Street Viaduct (GDOT Bridge #051/00025/A/00138N) is a concrete girder viaduct measuring 2265x43 feet and containing 6 main spans and 57 approach spans. It is one of five viaducts, similar in length and age, that spans railroad facilities in the State of Georgia. It is the only such known structure bridge in Chatham County and in that region of the State. Of the four remaining viaducts, three are located in Atlanta and one in Columbus.

The Bay Street Viaduct was constructed by the Central of Georgia Railroad in 1927, with the city of Savannah's approval. It was built at a time when conflicts between traditional railroad transportation and increasing automobile and truck traffic required solutions involving massive grade separation structures. As such, these structures were among the most important public works of their day. Though railroad facilities have been located in the immediate area of the bridge since the 1850s, there is no other known crossing of these facilities prior to the construction of the Bay Street Viaduct.

According to John W. Reps in The Making of Urban America, in the 1920s and 1930, the City Efficient Movement replaced the City Beautiful Movement as the main goal of city planners. The shift in emphasis to more practical city planning was a reaction against the earlier movement and its grand style. This viaduct was built by the railroad with city approval, in an effort to provide a more efficient transportation system in Savannah.

The bridge was designed by Olaf Otto, a local architect and engineer, who immigrated to this country from Norway in 1905. Otto came to Savannah in 1912, where he designed many residences, industrial plants, and other buildings. Two of his better-known projects were the first steel bridge linking Georgia and South Carolina, and the Bay Street Viaduct.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

GDOT Maintenance Records

Savannah Evening Press, July 8, 1960; obituary of Olaf Otto.

Beth Reiter, City Preservation Officer for Savannah.

Paul Liles, Engineer, GDOT Office of Bridge Design.

Dr. Jim Brittain, Professor, Georgia Institute of Technology.

John W. Reps, The Making of Urban America, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965.

Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer.